

COMMUNITY

‘Carson Cares’ ACS offers orientation for spouses

Story and photos by Rebecca E. Tonn

Mountaineer staff

Carson cares about newly arrived spouses to Fort Carson. In fact, a free orientation, Carson Cares, is offered on the first Thursday of each month by Army Community Service. The orientation includes a welcome gift, lunch, refreshments, free child care and an opportunity to meet new friends who are in a similar situation. What's not to like?

Carson Cares provides invaluable information for new arrivals to Fort Carson and an opportunity to network. Newcomers can learn in a few hours what might take other spouses months or years to learn. Spouses learned during the Feb. 1 orientation what Fort Carson offers.

What is worse than getting a permanent change of station — maybe even to a beautiful city like Colorado Springs — only to walk into a totally empty apartment? No furniture, no dishes. What's for dinner? And what do we sleep on tonight? Well, now the secret is out.

“When you're PCSing, you can request a 30-day loan of household goods from the ACS Loan Closet,” said Lori Barteau, relocation readiness assistant for Family Connection, facilitator of the Carson Cares program.

The Loan Closet offers: electric skillets, folding tables and chairs, cots, portable baby cribs, crock pots, coffee percolators, dishes, cookware, flatware, alarm clocks, toasters, high chairs, car seats and more. If household goods are still in transit, this will save newly arrived families time, money and hassle. After all, no matter how tasty, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken quickly lose appeal if consumed three times per day for a month. Can anyone say “diet center”?

Another little-known fact is that the Family Connection, building 1354, has computers for use on site and children are welcome to accompany their parents.

Spouses were surprised to learn from a variety of guest speakers how many resources are available to them. They discovered where to go to: learn how to manage their finances, get nutritional counseling, borrow books and DVDs, take a class to interpret all the endless Army acronyms, learn how to navigate Tri-West healthcare system and whom to go to when they need a sympathetic ear or guidance.

Georganne Bell, married to 2nd Lt. Stanford Bell, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Division, has been at Fort Carson since November. Bell said the orientation was much better than she thought it would be.

“There are many programs presented (at orientation), so everyone can find at least one or two they



Newly arrived spouses listen to Jeanne Koss, right, Soldier and Family Readiness, Family Advocacy Program manager, as she presents numerous available resources for Soldiers and families.

want to be involved in. They give you an overview with enough information; if you're interested, they leave you their phone number to call for more information,” Bell said. Bell plans to attend Family Readiness Group leader training in the near future.

Anita Williams, wife of Sgt. 1st Class Michael Williams, 576th Engineer Company, 4th Engineer Battalion, has been at Fort Carson for four weeks. After learning about the Mountain Post Wellness Center and four fitness centers on post, Williams said she would definitely take advantage of them.

“When my husband goes to Iraq, I'll go to the Workforce Center for help on my resume and to the library,” Williams said. She also plans to get involved with an FRG because she knows firsthand how valuable they are.

“I could not have made it through his first deployment without it. FRGs are the best thing — everybody is going through the same thing. And I would definitely recommend this class to others,” Williams said.

Both Bell and Williams said that there were no programs similar to Carson Cares at other posts where their husbands have been stationed.

Many of the guest speakers and volunteers at Carson Cares are also military spouses; they have personal experience with learning their way around new territory. They show concern and are friendly, inviting spouses to call them with questions about programs and resources at Fort Carson.

Spouses chatted with one another during breaks and lunchtime, exchanging phone numbers and suggestions for local

restaurants and shopping malls. Each spouse received a sturdy, red and black canvas ACS tote bag, a sewing kit and pamphlets to two dozen on post and local community resources.

After the class, most spouses opted to take a van tour of the post — an easy way to learn one's way around the installation. The tour included a visit to the Outdoor Recreation Complex, which also houses Information, Tickets and Registration and The Equipment Resource Center. Eric Hill, director of Outdoor Recreation, told the group about Adventure Programs and Education's ski trips, Alpine Tower ropes course, and rock and ice climbing and mountain biking classes.

Several spouses said they left the class feeling relieved. A few had only been at Fort Carson less than a week and had felt overwhelmed and isolated before attending Carson Cares. One spouse said she felt much better — knowing where to go for resources and to exercise and how to find her way around post. She had also made new friends.

To reserve a place at orientation, call Barteau at 526-1070. For child care reservations, call 526-2463 and have immunization records for each child. Carson Cares is in the Family Connection, building 1354, located on Barkeley, between Nelson and Prussman boulevards.



Eric Hill, right, director of Outdoor Recreation, tells spouses about Adventure Programs and Education's ski trips, mountain biking trips and kayaking classes.

Carson Cares Spouse Orientation

Red Cross
Tri-West healthcare
Family Readiness Groups
Military Family Life Consultants
Financial Readiness
Employment Readiness
Exceptional Family Member Program
Family Advocacy
Mayoral Program/ Volunteer Program
Pikes Peak Library District
Army Family Team Building/Army Family Action Plan
Military Outreach Programs, Armed Services YMCA
Wellness Center
GMH Military Family Housing
Directorate of Morale, Welfare and Recreation
Enlisted Spouses Charitable Organization
Fort Carson Officers' Spouses' Club
Fort Carson Parent -2-Parent
VIP Tour of Fort Carson